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Base activists not guilty

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After a week-long trial, seven antiwar activists who argued their disruptive actions were justified, were found not guilty on all counts Monday by a Lake County Circuit Court jury, after just one hour of deliberation.

Associate Judge Alphonse Witt presided over the trial that stemmed from a Nov. 13 demonstration outside Great Lakes Naval Base in North Chicago in which more than 200 anti-war activists protested U.S. military intervention in Central America and the continued nuclear arms buildup.

Originally, 16 protesters were on trial, but charges were dropped last week against eight of the protesters. Monday, a ninth defendant was dismissed from the case.

In final defense testimony, a Puerto Rican civil engineer charged that the United States government has a plan that would result in the destruction of his island country.

Alexis Massol, an engineer involved in designing plants and housing projects, also told the jury about U.S. preparations that resulted in using Puerto Rico as a base for war operations in Central America.

Other testimony Monday came from Ralph McGehee, an ex-CIA agent, who authored a book criticizing the agency after becoming disillusioned with its operations.

The anti-war activists had been charged with mob action and resisting police officers after they sat down and linked arms, blocking traffic on Sheridan Road and 22nd Street near the Naval Base. In their trial, the protesters used a "necessity defense."

Four defense attorneys and three defendants repeatedly told the jury in closing arguments that the demonstrators acted out of necessity, believing their actions necessary to prevent greater dangers from further U.S. military involvement in Central America.

Assistant State's Attorney David Semmelman told jurors the defendants were attempting to put the United States government on trial.

"They had a choice," Semmelman said, "and decided to break the law by blocking traffic, although their actions would in no way prevent military actions in Central America."

"They were frustrated," Semmelman said, "because President Reagan had been re-elected a short time before and they were dissatisfied with his policies."

The seven defendants acquitted are:

- Anna Edsal, 18, of Chicago, a University of Illinois Circle Campus student.
- Sister Dorothy Gartland, 55, a Catholic sister of Providence, former missionary to Guatemala and a co-founder of the 8th Day Center for Justice in Chicago.
- Steve Hardin, 28, LaCrosse, Wis., a child care worker and a member of a Witness for Peace group that went to Nicaragua last year.

● Anna Jarka, 17, a student at Oak Park High School.

● Margaret Kelly, 57, an Evanston homemaker and the mother of three.

● Nicklos Stein, 19, a student on leave from Lawrence College in Appleton, Wis.

● Danny Rochman, 25, a South African native and now a United States citizen. He walked across Europe in the summer of 1984 to protest the nuclear arms buildup.

Massol, the Puerto Rican engineer, testified that in 1983, 40,000 U.S. troops and 200 ships used Puerto Rico as a practice site for the invasion of the island of Grenada a short time later.

Massol charged that the U.S. plan that will eventually lead to the island's destruction is called the "20-20 Plan," because it is hoped to be in effect by the year 2020.

The plan calls for constructing several industrial parks to be used for the production of military equipment, Massol testified, adding that 90 per cent of Puerto Rican industry consists of American firms.

Environmental laws are much less restrictive in Puerto Rico than in the U.S., Massol said. He said strip mining is planned in a number of areas because strategic minerals have been discovered on Puerto Rico.

McGehee, the ex-CIA agent, charged the CIA has been responsible for numerous major covert operations such as the uprising in Laos several years ago and the present fighting in Central America. McGehee further charged that the agency is responsible for innumerable minor covert operations, including the assassination of a foreign official.

McGehee said contras (counter-revolutionaries in Nicaragua) are supported by the CIA and have killed close to 5,000 persons in raids from the borders of neighboring countries.